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ABSTRACT

This commentary on the Council for Exceptional Children-Council on Education of the Deaf's (CEC-CED's) Joint Knowledge and Skills Statement, which sets forth qualifications needed by those who teach deaf and hard of hearing students, discusses key issues impacting the education of students who are deaf or hard-of-hearing: cultural flexibility, "over-servicing," and communication adaptability. In addressing cultural flexibility, the paper describes the bicultural characteristics of people with deafness and the different behavior of students who are deaf that is sometimes considered immature by the hearing community. The discussion on over-servicing touches on the isolation of students with deafness because of the number of professionals and services which require them to leave the classroom. The importance of developing strong self-advocacy, coping and assertiveness skills in students with hearing impairments is also emphasized. Finally, the problem of student-to-student communication is reviewed and the need for ongoing interactions with peers and role models who are deaf or hard-of-hearing is highlighted. Questions are posed for each of the three issues on how to prepare teachers to meet the challenges of educating hearing-impaired students. (CR)

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Can I Read Between the Lines? An Outsider's Observations on the CEC-CED Joint Knowledge and Skills Statement

by

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The CEC-CED Joint Knowledge and Skills Statement sets forth a very comprehensive inventory of the qualifications needed by those who would teach Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. However, the Statement raised several issues in my mind that I believe are important to consider in the education of these students. Some of these issues appear to be addressed in the statement whereas others are either implicitly addressed or may not be considered. I wish to discuss the three topics of cultural flexibility, "over-servicing" and communication adaptability from my perspective as a researcher and administrator working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing college students. The topics addressed seem to be a particular challenge to the students with whom I am familiar.

Cultural Flexibility

In today's world the terms bilingual and bicultural (or multicultural) are commonly used to recognize the complex nature of American society. Recent studies indicate that a bilingual and/or bicultural individual is not simply the sum of two languages and/or two cultures but an unique individual with unique competencies. Ila Parasnis in a recent book (Parasnis, 1996) offers the argument that deaf persons are members of a bilingual-bicultural minority group in America:

> The perspective that deaf people should be primarily regarded as a cultural and language minority group rather than as individuals with an audiological disability is gathering support among educators, linguists, and researchers involved in the education of deaf people.

Certainly this statement is not true for some Deaf and, perhaps, most Hard-of-Hearing persons. However, Francois Grosjean (Grosjean, 1996) in his writing on bilingualism and biculturalism in that book asserts that most Deaf people meet the criteria for being considered bicultural:

1. They live in two cultures, home, school, workplace, etc.
2. They adapt at least in part, to both cultures.
3. They blend aspects of both cultures in their lives.

According to Grosjean, the blending of cultures occurs along a continuum from Deaf dominant to Hearing dominant. Being bilingual does not require that an individual be equally competent in both languages, as well. What does being bilingual and/or bicultural mean to a young Deaf person? Does it affect Hard of Hearing students, also?

As is often true when different cultures co-exist in the same community, we find that social behavior that is perceived as appropriate and acceptable in one setting may be seen as inappropriate in another. Carol Padden (Padden, 1996) explains this phenomenon as the "tension between cultures." That is, the bicultural individual does not live in the additive state of two cultures, but rather exists in the tension between the two cultures. Deaf and Hard of Hearing college students are often perceived as immature because of the behavior of some in dormitories and other college social settings. Such behavior is most criticized when it is noisy or otherwise felt as intrusive by hearing persons. They may also exhibit "hearing behavior" that is unacceptable in the Deaf community. The Statement rightly calls for the attention to cultural factors

in teaching and classroom management for these students, but how do teachers help students to develop flexibility in dealing with the tension between cultures?

Isolation by "Over-servicing" - Fact or Fiction?

During the past three years I was a member of the Research Advisory Group for NTID. Part of that groups' assignment was to collect opinions from professionals who work with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children outside of the institute on the priorities of the research framework that had been set up for NTID. One concern that came back to the group was that of the isolation of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children by the practice of "over-servicing." Behind this concern was the observation that too often the child is separated from hearing peers and normal classroom experiences because of the number of professionals and services which require them to leave the classroom.

Research findings have reflected a similar problem for college students. I have conducted research on the experience of Deaf and Hard of Hearing college students in the regular classroom (e.g., Saur, Layne and Hurley, 1983). One theme that frequently arose from interview data was the ambivalence many students felt over receiving support services . On one hand they acknowledged their need and dependence on such services. On the other hand they resented being set apart from their hearing peers by these services. As one young Deaf woman put it,"...(they) made Deaf students too special."

At first, this idea of overservicing seems ludicrous. It is only recently that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children have begun to attain their rights to full and adequate

educational support services. The question I have concluded, is really not whether a child is isolated by receiving too many services. It is more likely that the perceived problem arises from how and where necessary services are delivered.

I have gone on to link these observations to the on-going debate over the concepts of special education vs. mainstreaming vs. inclusion vs. full inclusion (Special Education Inclusion, 1996). The latter three concepts are defined as follows:

- Mainstreaming is the assumption that a disabled child will be put into the regular classroom only if he/she is able to "keep up" with the other students. The child is removed from the classroom for any needed services.
- Inclusion carries with it the commitment that a child will be educated to the maximum extent appropriate in the regular classroom and that most services will be brought to the child. It requires only that the child benefit from being in the classroom with other students, not keeping up.
- Full inclusion would require that all children be placed in the regular classroom and that all services be brought to them.

Cogent arguments are made against full inclusion for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children by experts in the field (see Cohen, 1995) and this paper is not intended as advocacy for that or any other concept. However, if some version of inclusion becomes the trend in education then teachers of Deaf and hard-of-hearing children will participate in multiple teaching/learning approaches that will change the way education is brought to these children. How do we prepare teachers to adapt to these changes? Or, if current practice prevails, how do teachers help to balance a child's

need for services outside the classroom with that child's need for being in the classroom learning with other children? Will the practice of separating children into deaf-only special education classes continue?

Coping Skills

One of the goals we have in the support departments at NTID is to foster the development of strong self-advocacy and assertiveness skills in the students with whom we work. They need the ability to deal with what may often be an indifferent or even hostile world. Too often students come to us - and not only as freshmen - without a clear picture of what their needs are for support. Nor, do they know how to get that support once identified, expecting it to come to them or others to find it for them. Learning such skills should start long before a student enters college and would be extremely important for the young person who does not go on to post-secondary education.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) puts the responsibility for identifying needs squarely on the shoulders of the disabled individual. It would, of course, fall to parents of young Deaf and Hard of Hearing children to advocate for them. But, as they grow and mature children need to learn how to advocate for themselves. To learn the appropriate use of support services is one thing To learn how to effectively advocate for oneself is a necessary additional skill. Also, Deaf children might well learn from experienced Deaf adults what to do, how to survive in situations where services are not available.

Communication Adaptation

This topic seems to be addressed at least in part in the Statement and I bring it up in this paper as much for emphasis and endorsement as anything. Yearly, we deal with the problem of student-to-student communication in our first quarter freshman seminar course. Too many of our students have no idea how to deal with other Deaf or Hard of Hearing persons who have different communication needs and modes of communication in a group such as exists in a classroom. Students who use only sign cannot deal with students who only speechread and vice versa. Emphasizing the need for students to have ongoing interactions with peers and role models who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing is a good thing. However, learning to adapt to and to accept differing communication styles is also a necessary skill. What do students do if they are both Deaf or Hard of Hearing , can't understand each other but yet have to work together?

Conclusion

One of the most compelling aspects of the Statement is its implicit, sometimes hidden recognition that education takes place within a social/cultural context and also becomes an instrument of change in that context. Thomas Spady (1975) in an old article detailed this concept by calling education, "The Socialization of Competence." By recognizing the various possible forms of bilingualism and biculturalism in Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing persons we are making progress toward recognizing them as complete individuals, not as deficient hearing people. Educating young Deaf persons

in a way that makes them proud of their uniqueness empowers them to be flexible and deal with the tension that naturally exists between cultures.

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